



South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



PATHS CLEARED FOR NEW STATE VETERANS HOME PROJECT

Last week Governor Daugaard signed into law, legislation that seeks additional budget authority for construction of the new state veterans home. That clears the last hurdle for the home.

The bid process is now open for construction of the new South Dakota Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home (MJFSVH) in Hot Springs, with bids being accepted until 3:00 pm on Wednesday, March 27, 2013. The bids will include the construction of the new facility, excavation, building demolition, site work, and utilities, mechanical, electrical, plumbing and general construction.

The State also went to bids last week for plumbing and electrical upgrades for Building #2 at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. These bids will be accepted until 3:00 pm on Thursday, March 14, 2013.

"Many players have assisted us along the way in making this dream a reality," said Deputy Secretary Harding. "Our special thanks to Governor Daugaard, Lt. Governor Michels and the South Dakota Legislature. We are anxious for the construction to begin and will keep you posted on the progress."



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IMPROVING THE LIVES FOR OUR SERVICE MEMBERS

Last week, First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden highlighted the work that has been done across the country to change laws that require military spouses to attain new credentials when they move to a new state, and challenged the governors of all 50 states to take legislative or executive action to help our troops get the credentials they need by the end of 2015.

Speaking to governors from across the country, Mrs. Obama spoke about the pressing need to take action and fulfill our responsibilities to the brave men and women who have sacrificed so much over the past decade:

"In the coming years, more than one million service members will make the transition to civilian life. Think about that – a million people hanging up their uniforms... figuring out what's next... and doing everything they can to make that change as seamless as possible for their families. So the fact is, while this time of war may be ending, our responsibilities to our troops and their families will only be ramping up.

And that's what I want to talk to you about today—how we can fulfill what is perhaps our most pressing responsibility to our troops: making sure that when they come home, they can find a job—and not just any job, but a good job, a job they can raise a family on."

Ensuring that our service members leave the military with the ability to transfer their education and training to the civilian job market and can use their skills in whatever state they choose to call home isn't just the right thing to do – it is the smart thing to do for our economy.

Last year, the Department of Defense established the Military Credentialing and Licensing Task Force at the direction of President Obama. The group has identified and created opportunities for service members to earn civilian occupational credentials and licenses, focusing their efforts on well-paying industries and occupations that have a high demand for skilled workers, including: manufacturing; information technology; transportation and logistics; health care; and emergency medical services.

Moving forward, the Task Force will be expanding its efforts to assist states in translating military training and experience into credit towards professional licensure. The objectives of this initiative will be to accelerate states' occupational licensing processes and to streamline approaches for assessing the equivalency of military training and experience.

Last year, South Dakota enacted legislation (SB 87) that would allow military spouses to receive unemployment compensation if they leave their jobs due to a spouse's military transfer. This year House Bill 1180 (an act to allow veterans to receive credit for certain military training and experience and Senate Bill 117 (an act to provide for an expedited endorsement of certain licenses, certificates, registration, and permits for spouses of active duty military personnel) were passed.



MAGEE JOINS DEPARTMENT

Krystal Magee has joined the team at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Claims Office in Sioux Falls. She replaces Lucy Hartman who recently retired. Krystal began her duties with the Department on March 1 and will be the first voice you hear when you call the Claims Office.

Krystal grew up in Mobridge, South Dakota, and is a 2012 graduate of Augustana College. Her favorite season is summer and she loves to garden.

Krystal enjoys meeting new people, and believes assisting America's veterans is very important and is looking forward to working with South Dakota veterans.

Krystal is passionate about learning new things and expanding her horizons. Her favorite saying is one of Gandhi's, "Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever." Krystal believes that it is important to know that everyone around you has something to teach you, and that every experience is valuable.



OPERATION BLACK HILLS CABIN GROWS

Previously, we told you about Jeff and Pat Bairds "Operation Black Hills Cabin" project. Their dream is similar to the "Energizer Bunny," it just keeps going and growing. What started as a dream to provide a summer vacation get away for a wounded Iraq or Afghanistan veteran and family, has grown into an all expense paid week in the Hills. The package includes lodging, meals, and admission to many nearby family attractions in the Black Hills.

Last year, the Bairds met with officials from the South Dakota Housing Authority to see about getting a custom-built Governor's home. And as of this week, Operation Black Hills Cabin now has a permanent 1,200 square foot Governor's house to be used as a vacation home for wounded veterans. In selling this concept, the Bairds not only had the support of the South Dakota Housing Authority, but they also had the support of the city of Custer. The city of Custer donated the land that the house is located on and stubbed in the water and sewer hookups.

There are more than 100 businesses in the surrounding area that are offering free services to veterans, and their families that stay at the cabin. Community leaders believe there is room for at least one more cabin on the site and are hopeful that another similar structure can be added sometime in the future.

An open house is being planned for April 18.

Veterans interested in applying for a week-long vacation can submit an application. The application form can be found at operationblackhillscabin.org.

VETERANS JOIN GOVERNOR AT BILL SIGNING

Gov. Dennis Daugaard, with an audience of veterans and legislators, signed legislation Wednesday, March 6, advancing military veterans' issues.

The Governor signed HB1118, which deals with special license plates for veterans with disabilities; HB1180, which allows veterans to receive credit for certain military training and experience; SB83, which designates Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day (March 30) as a working state holiday; and SB117, which provides expedited endorsement of licenses, certificates, registrations and permits for spouse of active-duty military personnel.

He also commemorated three other veterans' bills that were signed Monday – HB1067, which designates POW/MIA Recognition Day (third Friday in September) as a working state holiday; HB1084, which designates Purple Heart Recognition Day (August 7) as a working state holiday; and SB27, which appropriates additional funds for construction of a new state veterans' home in Hot Springs.



*Courtesy photos taken by Chad Coppess, South Dakota Department of Tourism

Upcoming Events

Mar. 8—SFVAHCS Veterans Arts and Crafts Show
Mar. 14—VABHHCS Veterans Creative Arts Show—Fort Meade
Apr. 1—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am
Apr. 11—Yankton Career Fair—Regional Technical Education Center—1:00-6:00 pm
April 19-21—VABHHCS Women Veterans Retreat—Ft. Meade VA Medical Center
May 3-5—DAV State Convention—The Lodge—Deadwood
May 11—Yellow Ribbon for the 935th—Rapid City
May 19—Yellow Ribbon for the 927th—Sioux Falls
Jul. 1—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am
Oct. 1—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am
Dec. 15—Wreaths Across America Ceremony—Black Hills National Cemetery—10:00 am

This week, the Fallen Heroes Banners were on display at the South Dakota State Capitol. Future dates and locations for the display are as follows:

June 8 - SPC Dennis Jensen Memorial Ride in Brookings
July 4 - Main Street Square - Rapid City
Aug. - SPC Dennis Jensen Memorial Ride in Whitewood
Aug. 24-25—Freedom Bird—W.H. Lyons Fairground—Sioux Falls
Oct. 15-17 - Voc Rehab Conference at the Pierre Ramkota
Nov. 1-10 - Middle School Library in Yankton



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